CONGRESSIONAL LEGISLATURE AND THE CIVIL WAR: TELLING THE STORY WITH PRIMARY SOURCES

Introduction

We are able to learn about Congress's activities during the Civil War by analyzing primary sources generated during this period. Many of these sources are available for us to study and learn about the work of Congress.

This activity engages students ithrough conducting research and writing an essay in studying legislative primary sources to learn about Congress' actions on key issues they faced during the Civil War. While intended for 8th grade students, the lesson can be adapted for other grade levels.

National Standards

U.S. History National Standards

United States Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)

- Standard 1: The Causes of the Civil War

- Standard 2: The course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people

- Standard 3: How various reconstruction plans succeeded or failed

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, grade 8

Reading Informational Text 1, 2, 6

Writing 2, 4, 5

Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, grade 8

Reading 1, 2

Writing 1, 2, 7

Learning Skills

Analyzing documents, group discussions, research, writing and presenting

Essential Question

What are we able to learn about an event, people or a place by studying primary source documents?

Suggested Activities

Teacher Tip:

For this activity you will be using National Archives Analysis Worksheets for studying primary sources. They can be found on the National Archives website under resources for teachers. See the links below:

- Document Analysis worksheets: http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/

- DocsTeach: http: http://www.docsteach.org/

Internet Research

Instruct each student to explore the recommended *Building a More Perfect Union* Website online tour. Students select one of the four recommended tour themes.

Tell students to research their chosen theme and pay close attention to the display of primary sources.

Selecting a Primary Source

After reviewing the site, students select a primary source to study further. Distribute to each student a Document Analysis worksheet specific to their chosen document or object. If possible, have students download and print the document or object from the website.

Analyzing Primary Source

Students use the Document Analysis worksheets to learn more about their chosen primary source.

Research and Writing

Using information gathered on their worksheet, as well as further research, students prepare an essay describing its significance and what they learned about the primary source.

Recommended Reading

Joyner, Holly and Pat Luce. *Easy Simulations: How a Bill Becomes a Law: A Complete Tool Kit with Background Information, Primary Sources, and More to Help Students Build Reading and Understanding How Our Government Works.* Scholastic Teaching Resources, New York, New York, 2008.

Websites

U.S. Capitol Visitor Center
http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/civilwar/#/timeline/

National Archives and Records Administration, Document Analysis Worksheets
http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/

Background Information

From its beginning in 1789, the work of Congress has created a wide variety of legislative documents such as bills, transcriptions of debates, memorandums and letters. Many of these sources are available for us to study and learn about the work of Congress. These sources are called "primary sources."

A primary source is any material created during the time period being studied. They can include everything from paper items—such as document, diaries, books, or letters to video footage, or photographs. Even a building, clothing, furniture, or other objects can be studied as primary sources. Although created after the time period being examined, oral histories are considered primary sources because they contain first-person accounts of actual events. By studying these sources we can learn about people, places and events.

This activity engages students in researching legislative primary sources online using the Capitol Visitor Center's online exhibition *E Pluribus Unum—Out of Many, One* and its new addition, *Building a More Perfect Union: Congress, the Capitol Building and the Civil War.*

The *Building the More Perfect Union* site is divided into online tours that explore specific themes. Each tour includes documents and artifacts for analysis. See below the recommended tours for analyzing and studying primary sources for your students.

Tour 1—The Slavery Debate
http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/Civil_War/Slavery_Debate

Tour 2—Congressional Drama
http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/Civil_War/Congressional_Drama

Tour 3—Road to Freedom and Equality
http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/Civil_War/Freedom_Equality

Tour 5—Wartime Financing and Legislation
http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/Civil_War/Financing_Legislation

Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):
   - ☐ Newspaper
   - ☐ Map
   - ☐ Advertisement
   - ☐ Letter
   - ☐ Telegram
   - ☐ Congressional record
   - ☐ Patent
   - ☐ Press release
   - ☐ Census report
   - ☐ Memorandum
   - ☐ Report
   - ☐ Other

2. UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):
   - ☐ Interesting letterhead
   - ☐ Notations
   - ☐ Handwritten
   - ☐ "RECEIVED" stamp
   - ☐ Typed
   - ☐ Other
   - ☐ Seals

3. DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:
   _____

4. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:
   _____

   POSITION (Title):
   _____

5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?
   _____

6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)
   A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   B. Why do you think this document was written?

   _____

   _____

   C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

   _____

   _____

   D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

   _____

   _____

   E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

   _____

   _____

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Artifact Analysis Worksheet

1.	**TYPE OF ARTIFACT**
	Describe the material from which it was made: bone, pottery, metal, wood, stone, leather, glass, paper, cardboard, cotton, wood, plastic, other material.
	_____

2.	**SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE ARTIFACT**
	Describe how it looks and feels: shape, color, texture, size, weight, movable parts, anything printed, stamped or written on it.
	_____

3.	**USES OF THE ARTIFACT**
	A. What might it have been used for? _____
	B. Who might have used it? _____
	C. Where might it have been used? _____
	D. When might it have been used? _____

4.	**WHAT DOES THE ARTIFACT TELL US**
	A. What does it tell us about technology of the time in which it was made and used?
	_____
	B. What does it tell us about the life and times of the people who made it and used it?
	_____
	C. Can you name a similar item today?
	_____

5.	**BRING A SKETCH, A PHOTOGRAPH, OR THE ARTIFACT LISTED IN 4C ABOVE TO CLASS.**

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Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

LEVEL 1	
VISUALS	WORDS (not all cartoons include words)
1. List the objects or people you see in the cartoon.	1. Identify the cartoon caption and/or title. 2. Locate three words or phrases used by the cartoonist to identify objects or people within the cartoon. 3. Record any important dates or numbers that appear in the cartoon.

LEVEL 2	
VISUALS	WORDS
2. Which of the objects on your list are symbols? 3. What do you think each symbol means?	4. Which words or phrases in the cartoon appear to be the most significant? Why do you think so? 5. List adjectives that describe the emotions portrayed in the cartoon.

LEVEL 3
A. Describe the action taking place in the cartoon. B. Explain how the words in the cartoon clarify the symbols. C. Explain the message of the cartoon. D. What special interest groups would agree/disagree with the cartoon's message? Why?

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Map Analysis Worksheet

1.	TYPE OF MAP (Check one):

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- ☐ Raised relief map
- ☐ Natural resource map
- ☐ Satellite photograph/mosaic
- ☐ Topographic map
- ☐ Military map
- ☐ Pictograph
- ☐ Political map
- ☐ Bird's-eye view
- ☐ Weather map
- ☐ Contour-line map
- ☐ Artifact map
- ☐ Other

2. UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE MAP (Check one or more):

- ☐ Compass
- ☐ Notations
- ☐ Title
- ☐ Handwritten
- ☐ Scale
- ☐ Legend (key)
- ☐ Date
- ☐ Name of mapmaker
- ☐ Other

3. DATE OF MAP:

_____

4. CREATOR OF THE MAP:

_____

5. WHERE WAS THE MAP PRODUCED?

_____

6. MAP INFORMATION:

A. List three things in this map that you think are important:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. Why do you think this map was drawn?

_____

C. What evidence in the map suggests why is was drawn?

_____

D. What information does the map add to the textbook's account of this event?

_____

E. Does the information in this map support or contradict information that you have read about this event? Explain.

_____

F. Write a question to the mapmaker that is left unanswered by this map.

_____

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